

Office of Human Resources Awards and Recognition

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- 2006 Celebrating Diversity
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- 2005 Building a Learning Organization
Integrated Benefits Processing and Self-Service Technology
- 2004 Community Computer and Internet Training to Utilize County Web-Based Services
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- 2002 Leadership Institute

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Local Government Personnel Association (LGPA)

- 2006 Jack Foster Personnel Executive of the Year Award – *Joseph Adler*
- 2006 Personnel Team Award – Employee Self-Service via Web Technology
- 2004 Innovation Award – Community-Based Internet Training Initiative
- 2003 Innovation Award – My HR On-Line Services
- 2002 Human Resource Technical Support Award – *Kermin Tsaur*
- 2002 Human Resource Technical Support Award – *Lori Plazinski*

Montgomery County IPMA Chapter Award

2005 Outstanding Public Service Award – *James Torgesen*

2004 Maryland House of Delegates Official Citation – Recognizing the Office of Human Resources 10th Annual Diversity Day Celebration

2004 Public Private Partnership Award – Peopleclick, Montgomery County and One Economy for Community Computer Internet Training

1999 National Society of Hispanic MBAs Award

Recognized by EPA and DOT as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters because of Montgomery County's benefits for commuters

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Agency Innovations

Building a Learning Organization in Montgomery County, Maryland

By Joseph Adler, IPMA-CP, SPHR, Montgomery County Office of Human Resources

Local governments have long been taken to task by public policy experts for neglecting the development needs of their employees thereby leading to the degradation of their ability to provide public services. As far back as 1993, the National Commission on the State and Local Public Service (Winter Commission) lamented the second (or perhaps third) class status given to training and development. The Commission found that decades of neglect caused a *knowledge gap* among employees and called upon state and local governments to create a *learning government* by committing the resources necessary for employees at all levels to acquire the skills needed to take on the jobs of tomorrow. Other students of government have also echoed this theme:

“Public employers have a long history of failing to make sustained investments in the training and development of their workforce. Often, they have been reluctant to spend the money needed to provide anything but the most basic training, and training and development budgets traditionally are the first to be cut or eliminated during periods of fiscal stress.”

Lloyd G. Nigro and Felix A. Nigro, *The New Public Personnel Administration*, fifth edition (Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 2000), p. 349.

“...It is increasingly important to apply new technology and new management philosophies...The paradox is that there is no evidence that training and development has experienced an increase in resources or attention. In fact, evidence seems to suggest that many organizations are reducing such resources.”

Evan M. Berman, James S. Bowman, Jonathan Page West and Montgomery Van Wart, *Human Resource Management in Public Service: Paradoxes, Processes, and Problems* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001), p. 233.

Heeding the exhortations of experts to invest in the human capital infrastructure, and facing an inevitable loss of expertise and competency due to the aging baby boomers in the workforce, Montgomery County, Md., a jurisdiction in the National Capital area with almost one million residents and more than 8,000 employees, decided to embark on an ambitious program to create a *learning organization* culture to encourage and facilitate employee development for the purpose of enhancing the delivery of county services to its residents and the business community. Early in his term of office, County Executive Douglas M. Duncan established nine guiding principles as the underpinning of all employee-customer interaction:

- Insisting upon customer satisfaction,
- Ensuring high value for tax dollars,
- Adhering to the highest ethical standards,
- Appreciating diversity,
- Being open, accessible and responsive,
- Empowering and supporting employees,
- Striving for continuous improvement,
- Working together as a team, and
- Being accountable.

In CY 2000, the Office of Human Resources (OHR) undertook an initiative to build a learning organization with five broad objectives: (1) align the learning initiative with the county’s guiding principles; (2) encourage employee career development to improve job performance; (3) partner with a local institution of higher education; (4) develop training programs that are convenient and financially afford-

able; and (5) recognize and reward employee development accomplishments. The needs assessment included a countywide training survey and meetings with focus groups of county managers and employees. Although the county offered many training courses, the consensus was that they were too scattered and did not fully meet the evolving needs of employees or management. In essence, the employee development program needed to be totally revamped and replaced by a customer-based learning model that encourages and facilitates the professional development of employees. Based on the recommendations of the focus groups, courses were added to the curriculum to provide a full range of developmental opportunities to enhance employee skills and knowledge to accommodate the emerging expectations of both management and customers. This included diversity topics so that employees could work more effectively with others who have different ethnic or cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Another priority was to prepare employees to more fully utilize the many benefits of information technology and data management in program planning and administration.

The manager and employee focus groups also suggested that training courses be packaged to provide better guidance for employees regarding their professional and career development. The result was that courses were consolidated by skill sets for comparable areas, which are referred to as “tracks.”

Another item that needed improvement was the dissemination of training information. This was addressed by publishing four separate training catalogs and individual flyers with course information and making those available to employees in both electronic and paper formats. An automated training line using interactive voice-response technology was also developed and implemented. Additionally the county needed a process for recognizing employees who completed training. This is important to many employees because various professional associations require training for their recertification processes. As a result, the county now grants certificates and Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to employees upon completion of training courses and tracks.

Implementation of the learning organization began in 2001 and was in place by 2002. The county now publishes four comprehensive training catalogues with specific cost-free learning opportunities for all employees. These include a professional development catalog, a core business system catalog, an information technology catalog, and a specialized continuous learning catalog for employees in human services areas who require CEUs.

Training tracks include required and elective courses that focus on specific subject areas such as communication skills, customer service, diversity studies, human resource management, performance management, and supervisory development. Most of the competency areas have separate supervisory and non-supervisory components. There is also a separate “Leadership Institute” that all of the county’s more than 330 top-level career managers are required to complete. Upon completing a track, the participant receives a certificate of completion and is eligible to receive CEUs. The number of CEUs given for each course is indicated on the course description in the training catalog, and the CEUs are accepted by most professional associations as verification that the training required for licensing recertification has been successfully completed. OHR also notifies the participant’s director of the training accomplishment.

Employees are required to have annual performance plans that identify their performance objectives and evaluate accomplishments. Supervisors are rated on their effectiveness in evaluating and developing employees. Each employee performance plan must include at least one professional development activity to

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Montgomery County, Maryland continued from page 13

reinforce a particular skill or knowledge that will enhance performance during the next performance year.

Montgomery County also provides tuition assistance for employees (\$1,330 full time and \$665 part time) who wish to pursue a degree at a college or university or to take job related courses not found in OHR's four catalogues. Last year 650 employees took advantage of this benefit.


At the conclusion of every training class, participants complete a course evaluation form. In addition to rating the course content and instructor, participants are asked to anticipate the impact of the learning opportunity on their job performance. A "Training Follow-up Survey" is sent to participants approximately three months after their completion of the course to confirm that the learned skills and knowledge were actually used in their jobs. Almost 100 percent of participants stated that the training was useful in their jobs and helped their professional development. Courses are constantly evaluated and modified based on need and feedback from participants.

Training needs surveys and customer service surveys use the Internet and intranet. The training catalogs and class calendars are available to employees on the OHR Resources Library Web site. Much of the actual training involves hands-on use of computers, particularly courses listed in the Annual Core Business Systems Training Catalog and the Semiannual Information Technology Training Catalog. The purpose in creating the OHR Computer Lab and Video Library was to provide for computer-based training. Both the automated training line and the tuition assistance component are linked to the county employee database. Responses to user requests on the automated training line are provided by e-mail or fax.

We believe that Montgomery County is well on its way to creating a learning organization that recognizes the evolving needs and taking proactive measures to invest in its human capital. Last year 7,800 participants attended 450 county-provided training courses. Course evaluations by participants confirmed that the skills and knowledge gained from attending these developmental opportunities enhanced their ability to deliver quality services to the county. Employees are better able to respond to the changing work environment and the needs of a demographically diverse constituency.

The Office of Human Resources, as the lead agency on human capital development and succession planning, also "walked the talk" when it came to building a learning organization. Enhancing core competencies by attaining professional certification has been instituted as a rating criteria in staff performance evaluations and a preferred requirement for all promotional opportunities. All management and a majority of the professional staff in Montgomery County OHR have enrolled in programs or courses of study leading to professional certifications.

We truly live at a time when practicing HR professionals must refresh their skills and competencies on a recurring basis in order to enhance their legitimate role as strategic partner to management of the public enterprise. Failure to do so brings on the risk of being considered obsolete, irrelevant, and may erase the gains made by the HR profession.

Joseph Adler, IPMA-CP, SPHR, is the director of the Montgomery County, Md. Office of Human Resources.. Assistance in writing this article was provided by Karen Plucinski, Manager of Training and Development, and Douglas Bliven, Human Resources Specialist in the Montgomery County Office of Human Resources. —

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Implementing Policies to Balance Work and Personal Life: Is There a Bottom Line Benefit?

By Angela Dizelos and Joseph Adler, IPMA-CP, SPHR

In the area of integration of work and family issues, Montgomery County, Md. has long recognized that its 8,000-plus employees often struggle to balance the demands of their job with the responsibilities in their personal lives. Montgomery County believes that strong work/life programs can increase employee morale and improve productivity. It is a critical component in enabling the county to attract and retain a well-qualified, diverse workforce. As Montgomery County continues to work in partnership with its county council and its three unions to implement successful work/life programs, everyone wins—employees, the organization and the residents of Montgomery County.

Montgomery County's efforts have been recognized by the Maryland Work-Life Alliance, an organization devoted to promoting a healthy balance between work and family issues. It has achieved the Maryland Work-Life Alliance's "Workplace Excellence" award for the last five years.

Montgomery County offers alternate work schedules, compressed workweeks, leave use to care for family members and part-time employment to its

employees. The county has also completed a Telework Pilot Program and is now implementing a countywide initiative that will allow eligible employees to reduce the time they spend commuting to work, thus giving them more time to spend with family or other personal business. The county also offers dependent care reimbursement accounts to address child care costs on a pre-tax basis.

Other compensation-related benefits that help employees integrate work and family include a \$35 per month transportation subsidy for employees who give up parking passes and use mass transit to get to work, free passes to use on the county administered bus system, an employee assistance program, discount gym membership, healthcare and dependent care reimbursement accounts, cafeteria-style benefits, job sharing, a sick leave donation program, on-site health screening and health fairs, employee awards programs, training and career development programs, paid long-term disability, and a tuition assistance program.

Montgomery County has a very competitive leave policy. Annual leave includes three weeks per year for the first three years of service, four weeks per year for the fourth through the fifteenth year of service and five weeks of leave beginning with the sixteenth year of service. In addition, employees receive three personal days each calendar year that they may use as they wish.

Employees of Montgomery County also receive three weeks per year of sick leave. Employees may use sick leave to care for immediate family members and may obtain sick leave donations from other employees through a sick leave donor program.

The county allows new parents—male or female—to be away from the job for 18 weeks to bond with a newborn or newly adopted child.

Montgomery County also has a military leave policy. For employees who are called to active duty under presidential authority, the County pays the difference between the county salary and the military salary.

Montgomery County's use of a balanced work/life approach has been successful as a recruitment and retention tool. Its extensive leave and benefit programs are used as a strategic recruitment tool to separate it from other public and private sector employers. Post-separation surveys of employees who left the county's payroll (in FY 2005 about 450 employees left the county government out of a total of more than 8,000 employees) show that of those who chose to leave voluntarily, less than 10 percent did so to find employment that offered better benefits or greater job flexibility.

As stated above, recognition of the need to integrate work life with personal issues and fashioning programs to accomplish this balance is part of the county's strategic approach to human capital development, resulting in a win for employees, county government, and most importantly for the taxpayers and residents of Montgomery County.

Angela Dizelos is manager of administrative services for the Montgomery County Office of Human Resources. Joseph Adler is director of the Montgomery County Office of Human Resources. For more information, contact Dizelos or Adler at (240) 777-5100. —*NC*

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Agency Innovations

Enterprise Hosting Infrastructure with Single Sign-On: *The Experience of Montgomery County, Maryland*

By Joseph Adler, IPMA-CP, SPHR

Technology has played a major role in transforming the way human resources agencies conduct business and interact with their customers. Technologically assisted processes once thought as novel have, in short period of time, become an accepted part of doing business. Receiving and tracking job applications through the Internet, for example, is now the norm in many large HR departments, especially if located in a competitive labor market. Technology has also driven many other process changes resulting in improved service to our internal and external customers. The findings of a recent IPMA-HR Technology Committee survey underscore this trend. Two-thirds of the respondents stated that they had a human resources information system (HRIS) in place, supporting such core functions as payroll (93 percent), benefits administration (67 percent), financials and accounting (58 percent) and time and attendance (54 percent). Almost half of the respondents (48 percent) also plan to upgrade or implement technological solutions within the next three years for services such as training and development, performance appraisal, online applications, employee self service, etc.

Moving toward increased use of automated solutions by human resources professionals is to be encouraged and applauded. Departments and agencies actively considering plunging into the HRIS pool should, however, also pay attention to developing the infrastructure that can support adding the additional layers of technological solutions, and should make sure that the automated applications are customer friendly. Neglecting this important step can lead to suboptimal use of human and financial resources as well as resistance to using technology on the part of the intended customers. Anecdotal evidence abounds of unlucky government agencies attempting to bring IT improvements to the workplace only to discover that the new system does not perform as promised, or enduring large cost overruns with the attendant negative publicity. Some agencies had the added unpleasant experience of having to scrap an already installed technological system and start anew. Montgomery County—the largest jurisdiction in Maryland with more than 8,000 employees (non education) and almost one million residents—opted to resolve this vexing issue by adopting a deliberate and incremental approach using in-house expertise, interdepartmental partnerships, a best-practices review and a work group that involved all stakeholders.

The Montgomery County Office of Human Resources' (OHR) strategic plan emphasized the use of technology to achieve the goal of providing high level customer service to employees, business partners and residents. In the first few years of adopting an e-business approach, multiple Web-based applications were developed to provide self-service via an automated online business process that focused on interdepartmental administrative needs. Over the last five years, OHR increased its Web presence from just two applications to more than 22. The multitude of IDs and passwords required to access the various systems became a tremendous challenge to the user community as well as a security risk to the county's Web systems. Personal computer monitors draped in sticky notes containing logon information was certainly not the answer to this situation. The most efficient solution lay in adopting state-of-the-art technology and robust architecture to implement industry best practices to meet increasing user demands and expectations. Interdepartmental partnership was also an essential component of this successful solution, because it brought together the best mix of qualified resources and specialized expertise to make the implementation a success.

OHR, in collaboration with the county's Department of Technology Services (DTS), implemented an Enterprise Hosting Infrastructure (EHI) with Single Sign-On to address the challenge of employees maintaining multiple logon IDs and passwords for systems access. EHI with Single Sign-On is designed to enable employees to use one user name and one password to access a variety of

online applications. Part of the implementation strategy was to enable employees of Montgomery County access to online services—especially the *MyHR*self-service application portal—in a user friendly and secure environment.

The Montgomery County Enterprise Hosting Infrastructure with Single Sign-On had the following objectives at its core:

- Enhance access and utilization of County online services (e.g., online group insurance enrollment, online parking registration, online financial disclosure);
- Facilitate participation in County's eBusiness programs;
- Streamline administration and reduce costs associated with the County's dependency on a legacy mainframe system;
- Promote intergovernmental coordination in addressing shared problems;
- Align information technology solutions with the County's guiding principle of promoting customer satisfaction;
- Provide a user friendly computing environment;
- Assure information security and accuracy, and resolve the technology gap of securing Internet and intranet Web systems access;
- Promote a paperless work environment.

The technical requirements were challenging. DTS and OHR had to build a secure, robust platform for hosting an increasing number of OHR applications; in short, rapid iterations. A multi-division, cross-departmental taskforce was formed to move from concept to production. The departmental stakeholders were briefed frequently regarding the hurdles and progress. Given the short timeframe, rapid prototyping techniques were used to validate the key concepts. Upon overcoming the technical configurations and integration challenges, a process was developed to streamline customer support activities. These included handling a myriad of application-specific queries and SSO-related requests.

EHI was set up to be a multi-purpose hosting platform, frontended by a robust SSO solution in the county's network. It was developed in planned, incremental cycles to meet the initial demands of OHR applications and eventually scaled to host a multitude of county IT programs. This phased-in approach proved valuable in managing personnel skills and developing expertise in the conglomeration of technologies involving networks, servers, monitoring and operations. This approach produced a time sequenced rollout of value-added applications and avoided the risk of a project collapse associated with a "lump sum" rollout of applications. The EHI is now available to more than 12,000 active county employees, 6,000 retirees, volunteers and county business partners to access the county's transaction systems. It supports the MyHR self-service application portal, a suite of HR self-service online applications with built in business rules that address employee needs. For example, the system's group insurance enrollment module walks employees through the process of selecting individual and qualified dependent benefit levels. The system automatically calculates the cost for each option and allows employees to see the results of different selection options before a final selection is made. Once a decision is made the information is fed directly into the HR portal's main administrative system, thus reducing the paperwork burden on OHR staff. Employees are also able to access the portal's pension administration system. There, they can interface with payroll information and receive projected retirement income information in real time. The list below shows the breadth and depth of HR applications available to

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Enterprise Hosting

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employees of Montgomery County. Applications are accessible by a single link, single ID and single password at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/ohr/ResourceLibrary/ohrsc.cfm>.

- ePAF (Personnel Action Form) Online System
- Performance Matters!
- Police Officer Multilingual Certification
- OHR Online Systems Administrative System
- Interpreter Tracking System
- Maryland Insurance Premium Payment System
- Emergency Contact Administrative System
- Emergency Contact Tracking System
- Employment Verification System
- Police Employee Information System
- Mystery Shopper Survey System
- OMS (Occupational Medical Services) Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Classification Survey Administrative System
- Exit Survey Administrative System
- Resource Library Administrative System
- Online Reduction In Force (RIF) System
- Online Annual Leave Cash-Out
- Online Benefits Open Enrollment System
- Online Pension Calculator System
- Online Training Management System

Additional county applications:

- Online Financial Disclosure
- Online Parking Management
- Employees' Charity Campaign Online Donation System

The Enterprise Hosting Infrastructure with Single Sign-On was developed with a budget of \$150,000 for server hardware and software licenses. All system configurations and related programming efforts were performed in house with OHR and DTS resources. A typical implementation cost of a project of this magnitude would be \$500,000 to \$800,000. An additional 20 percent of total costs would be then be required for annual maintenance fees.

By any objective measure, the initiative has met with overwhelming customer approval and success. Since its pilot rollout in December 2003, more than 300,000 transactions have occurred, including self-verifications of employment, online retirement projections and calculations, and online performance evaluations with EHI, the county now has the capability to take advantage of a number of new technologies not supported on the mainframe. These include but are not limited to Web application consolidation and Web hosting. The following are more facts and figures:

- Percent of online transactions in January 2003 was 15 percent; percent of online transactions in December 2005 was 80 percent.
- The number of Web systems currently available on EHI is 30.
- The number of county employees using online systems in 2003 was less than 2,000; there were more than 8,000 users in 2005.
- 85 percent of employees have accessed the system without reported problems due to the user friendliness of the e-business environment.
- The number of calls to the help desk have dropped significantly.

Should an agency embark on this initiative? Will the return on investment be positive? These are legitimate questions that can only be answered after a thorough analysis of an agency's needs and resources. For Montgomery County, the decision to invest in technology infrastructure has produced positive results for all concerned stakeholders. It has paid for itself in a single fiscal year, due to a

reduction of \$275,000 in the cost of providing the same level of mainframe services to county employees.

EHI is operational and will continue to host applications for years to come. This project not only met its original objectives, but has gone beyond them. It has significantly enhanced the cost effectiveness of existing OHR programs and provided the opportunity for multiple county agencies to pursue improved administration of existing programs, e.g. electronic financial disclosure, electronic time reporting management system/e-timesheets and electronic parking registration. It also offers new services to county residents, e.g. Web hosting of mission-critical services on a highly reliable platform. In this case the promise of lower costs and higher level of services via a technological solution was realized.

Joseph Adler is the director of the Montgomery County, Md. Office of Human Resources and a member of the IPMA-HR Technology Committee. Assistance in writing this article was provided by Eric Wallmark, division manager of employee benefits and information technology, and Theophile Nkangnia, manager of information management. —N

IPMA-HR International Training Conference Pre-Conference Workshops

Come to Las Vegas early and enhance your conference experience by participating in one or more of the five full-day pre-conference workshops starting on Saturday, October 7. These workshops provide an in-depth look at topics and issues of greatest importance in the public sector human resources community. With real life examples, case studies, vivid presentations and interactive sessions, you will gain a better understanding of hot topics. *This is just one of the exciting workshops being offered at this year's annual conference:*

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Highlights include:

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- Opportunities to apply performance management in your organizations
- The variety of performance management systems available and how to select systems appropriate for your organization and adopt them successfully

Emphasis will be given to how to sustain as well as adopt changes. Participants will have an opportunity to develop their own action plans for partnering with management in developing plans for their organizations.

Presenters: Sandra Biloan, IPMA-CP, Labor Mediator and Arbitrator; Dick C. Heil, IPMA-CP, Consultant, The Curtis Group.

For more information, contact IPMA-HR Director of Professional Development Carrie Hoover at (703) 549-7100, ext. 247, or by e-mail at choover@ipma-hr.org. —N